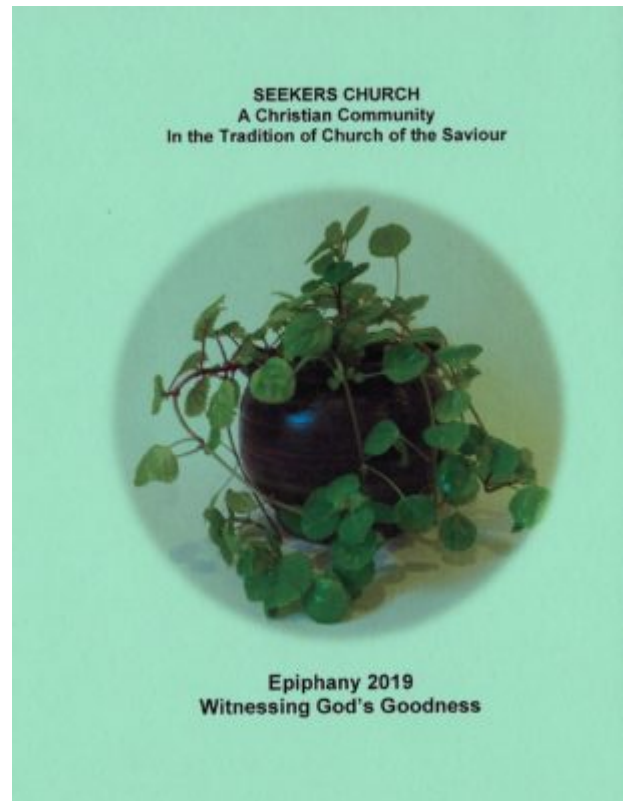


# “Epiphany” by Marjory Bankson

January 6, 2019



## The Feast of the Epiphany

Today we celebrate Epiphany, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, and the coming of the wise men with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Only Matthew tells the story of the wise men, astrologers who were the scientists of the ancient world. It's an expansion of Isaiah's prophecy – that foreign rulers would come to honor the Light of God which will arise from this people. From foreign countries, Isaiah says, kings will come with camels, bringing gold and frankincense. To those tangible signs of tribute, Matthew adds myrrh – a healing ointment used for burial. With that addition, Matthew shows his readers the symbols for Jesus' life, death and resurrection: gold, myrrh and frankincense. I could speak more about Matthew's midrashic expansion of the Jewish lectionary cycle, but we'll save that

for another day.

**Throughout Latin America**, Epiphany is the primary time for gift-giving. People celebrate Three Kings Day with parades, family gatherings and gifts for children. After all, kings and camels make more sense in tropical climates than Santa Claus and reindeer pulling a sleigh. One of my favorite holiday artifacts is this carved wooden fish from Guatemala, with three wise women on one side, and three ordinary people bringing bread, fruit and wood on the other side. The emphasis is on bringing their practical gifts – and that is what I want to speak of today.

Scientists are just now gathering data on how good gratitude and generosity are for our physical and psychic health. Now we know that it's GOOD FOR US TO GIVE! And it's damaging to live with fear and selfishness. That, too, is implied in Matthew's story of the wise men bearing gifts for the Christ child. They were warned in a dream about Herod's true motives, and so they went home by another way. They were led away from his trap. By a dream. Which they heeded.

**Not long ago**, one of our newer members asked when we would be passing out pledge cards or preaching about money. This is probably as close as we'll come to that. Today, I'm going to pull back the curtain on our budget and hope it will encourage you to claim your piece of the action.

Here at Seekers, we don't ask for pledges, but we do expect the Stewards to tithe. We know that Stewards carry about 70% of the budget each year. And we depend on the wider community for the rest. There is no hidden trust fund or foundation back-up. We want everyone to be intentional about their giving of time and money.

**When Seekers began in 1976**, we planned to give away only 10% of what we received in contributions. It was our understanding of the tithe at that time. We used the rest to pay our two

staff members, Fred and Sonya, and give a certain amount to Church of the Saviour in lieu of rent for our space at the headquarters building.

As giving increased, the core members (now Stewards) adopted a 50-50 guideline for our money, stating that we wanted to give away half of our contributed income to places where Seekers were "in ministry." That worked primarily because we didn't own a building and didn't have a full-time clergy person with healthcare needs.

**In 1996**, when the CoS churches incorporated separately, Seekers knew we would have to find a place of our own for worship. Many worried that owning a building would soak up our resources and curtail our external giving. Because we emphasize ministry in daily life and do not have a single mission capable of getting grants or District funding, we knew that our culture of generosity might be threatened by owning a building.

However ... giving increased and we were able to maintain our level of external giving as we paid off the renovation debt for this building. By being careful stewards of our money and doing many of the building tasks ourselves, we now own this building outright, with no mortgage. We have a capital reserve fund to pay for a new roof when that is needed and we continue to invest in ministries where we are personally involved.

**For 2019**, we have a balanced budget of \$277,500. On the altar, there are two cylinders. The slightly smaller one represents our ministry in this place, and the larger one represents "Outreach." Specifically, we plan to spend 49% of our income on our building and community life, and we plan to give away 51% of our income.

The two biggest items under Outreach are Domestic Giving (\$60,000) and International Giving (\$50,000). Each year, there is a new opportunity to request financial support for

something YOU are directly involved in. It's not enough to think it's a "good cause." We want our money to follow our personal engagement, not substitute for it. AND we expect you to "report" on that organization periodically, so you become an advocate and witness for their work. Requests for domestic organizations go to **Cynthia Dahlin**, and those will be decided at an open meeting after church in January. Requests for international giving go to **David Lloyd**, and those will be decided in February.

If you have made a request, you need to be present at that meeting to advocate for your proposal, because there are usually more requests than we can fund. Even if you have not made a request, I hope you will attend one of those meetings to see the process by which we reach a compromise. It says a lot about our community!

- If you have been an advocate for one of our domestic giving recipients, would you please stand so we can see the broad range of people who have asked for support? (Thank you)
- If you have requested funding for an international mission, would you please stand? I encourage you to ask these people about their connection with one of these overseas programs. (Thank you) For a small community, it's a remarkable range I think.

**Internally**, the two biggest categories are **building operations** and **community life**. The Time and Space Mission Group oversees the use and maintenance of our building for 21% of the budget. Although we consider building maintenance as an internal expense, it provides valuable space for some **800 other meetings besides Seekers!** It is a ministry of place! We have been truly blessed by the skills that many different people share freely, but I want to name Denise and Glen particularly. We have saved thousands of dollars because of their generosity, practical skill and applied expertise.

**Community life** (28% of the budget) includes the modest stipends that we pay our Servant Leadership Team, our building use manager and our treasurer, as well as the money spent by mission groups. This is where our value system shows up most clearly. What we need most from our highly-qualified leadership team is their **servanthood**, their willingness to listen and accompany, not to rescue and fix – or do the ministry that WE have been called to. Seminaries are not training people for this kind of servant ministry. It only comes with call and commitment, experience and vulnerability. We have been blessed with extraordinary gifts in that regard.

**What does not show up** in the budget is the richness of shared leadership and practical gifts that we enjoy here. Not only do we hear many different voices from this pulpit, but there are special gifts like Deborah's sermon with art to explain Advent, music by Roy Barber for the Bokamoso youth who will be here on February 3, hands-on help for the Christmas Eve potluck, and Care Packs to give away. It's not always easy to work with gifts and call instead of "hired excellence," but we know that we will never grow with ease and satisfaction. Growth comes with stretching, differing opinions and self-reflection – the intentional journey inward as well as time and money for the journey outward.

I made our communion set 40 years ago, when I was a full-time potter, and it's showing signs of long use. As Peter often says, "It represents our community, broken and whole, all at once." This year, I'm hoping to make a new one, so we can begin another 40-year cycle. Beyond what we add to the collection plate, I pray that we will continue to follow the wise men, by bringing our many and varied gifts to the altar – in every season of life.

**Finally**, I want to end with a note of remembrance. In addition to celebrating Epiphany, one year ago today, Kayla McClurg died. In her own words, she was the "point-person" for Church of the Saviour. As Trish Stefanik wrote this morning for our C

of S website, InwardOutward.org, Kayla “was one who faithfully followed her guiding star and illuminated the Word in ordinary-extraordinary ways through her writing.”

Then Trish closed with these words from Kayla: “We leave not only a carbon footprint as we journey on planet earth, but a soul print as well. Scattered around us everywhere we go is tangible evidence that we have been in this place. And as a result of our presence, this place is either more-or less-loving and hopeful and prone toward mercy. ... The Light of the World has come and shines through us—yes, even us!”

Amen.